



COLLABORATIONS



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The Newsletter for California's Community-Focused Court Planning and Court Community Outreach Initiatives

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"A new era of collaboration between county courts, the Judicial Council, and California's communities will lead to a renewal of public trust and confidence in the administration of justice and the primacy of the rule of law in California."
—Chief Justice Ronald M. George

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County Spotlight Strategic Planning Updates: El Dorado, Mono, and Glenn Counties

SUPERIOR COURT OF EL DORADO COUNTY, STRATEGIC PLANNING AT THE TASK LEVEL

The Superior Court of El Dorado County's planning team, under the leadership of **Alexander B. Aikman**, Executive Officer, and **Hon. Suzanne Kingsbury**, Presiding Judge, was one of several county courts submitting a draft strategic plan to the Community-Focused Court Planning Implementation Committee for review at its October 19, 1999, meeting. El Dorado's submission is a comprehensive document representing an impressive commitment to community involvement.

One of the planning team's many notable accomplishments is the plan's progress from strategic to the action level. Using the Implementation Committee's suggested plan format, the team tracks five long-range issues. This team's approach can be seen in how the team addresses one of the most important of these issues—the effective use of technology. The team began at the **strategic plan level** citing the use of technology to enhance productivity and to

move closer to being a "paperless court" as one of its long-range issues. At the next level—the **operational plan level**—one of several goals cited to address this same long-range issue was the use of technology for the exchange of data. Finally, the planning team tracked the original long-range issue to the **action plan level** by assigning specific tasks to each of the previously articulated operational plan strategies. The sample process is illustrated in the box that follows.

SAMPLE

STRATEGIC PLAN LEVEL

- Long-Range Issue 2: Use technology to enhance productivity, improve citizen access, provide modern filing and inquiry access for litigants, their attorneys, and members of the public, and move closer to the "paperless court."

OPERATIONAL PLAN LEVEL

- Goal 2.1: Exchange all data electronically, including traffic ticket information, with criminal justice agencies in the county, and do so within eight hours of the data's being created or entered by the originating agency.
- Strategy 2.1(a) Define communication protocols among agencies.
- Objective 2.1(a) 1. Enable electronic exchanges of information between different software packages.

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ACTION PLAN LEVEL

- Task: software protocols for each agency's software package(s) are catalogued
 - By: county's IS dept., court's systems coordinator, and agency's systems coordinators, if any.
 - By: Jan.–Mar. 2000
 - For fiscal year 1999 – 2000

As the planning team points out, a strategic plan of such comprehensive specificity represents a challenging agenda, but it is an agenda that team members believe will move the court much closer to the vision of the judicial institution it would like to become. Not coincidentally, it also moves the court much closer to the institution the community would like to have.



**SUPERIOR COURT OF
MONO COUNTY:
COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT KEY
ELEMENT IN STRATEGIC
PLANNING**

The draft strategic plan (in progress) recently submitted by the Superior Court of Mono County's planning team reflects the court's efforts to involve a wide range of community stakeholders. Under the leadership of **Hon. Edward Forstenzer**, Presiding Judge, the team has obtained the participation of many community groups, including representatives from the Latino community, the Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce, the Mono County Board of Supervisors, Mono County School District, Child

Protective Services and Mental Health Services, the Probation Department, and the California Highway Patrol. Meetings of these groups have already identified several key court issues that are in keeping with the major themes of the Judicial Council's strategic plan. One of these, "increased accessibility," has given the team the opportunity to set goals and strategies designed to make the courts more user-friendly for the county's sizable Latino community.

The court's draft plan already reflects a commitment to the goal of identifying and engaging language interpretation services and sets a desired-outcome date of 2004 for developing resources to eliminate the most pressing language barriers to court processes for Spanish-speaking participants.

Another of the plan's key issues, "instill community confidence through education and service," inspired the team to formulate several strategies to inform the public about court practices, including publishing periodic articles in the local newspaper, developing and increasing legal assistance to pro per litigants, and developing family court services as well as drug court and other community-responsive court services.

Says **Judge Forstenzer**, "as a small county, we are very sensitive to community participation as the key to successful implementation of the plan." Accordingly, the team's planning approach reflects a careful, steady, and deliberate commitment to community involvement.

**SUPERIOR COURT OF
GLENN COUNTY:
GETTING BEHIND THE
STRATEGIC PLANNING
EFFORT**

As in Mono County, the planning team for the Superior Court of Glenn County adopted the major strategic themes of the Judicial Council's strategic plan as the critical functions the court must perform. Led by **Hon. Donald C. Byrd**, Presiding Judge, and **Tina M. Burkhardt**, Court Executive Officer, the team turned to the community for assistance in identifying significant long-range issues within each of these themes. As a result, the team's membership was expanded to include—in addition to court, bar, and county board of supervisors representation—members from Soroptimists (a volunteer service organization for business and professional women), the Latino community, and the county's board of education. Additional meetings with stakeholders resulted in a plan responsive to stakeholder needs.

For example, the team was able to identify three long-range issues for one of its most important critical functions—modernization. The first of these issues, records management, motivated the team to identify as a primary objective on-line access to allowable information. Discrete tasks were then formulated to this end—including implementing case management systems and links; planning additional staff training in technology; developing press releases, signage and brochures; and hiring a technology supervisor. The team's action plan charges the court's executive officer with

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**Strategic Plan Due Date:
December 15, 1999**

implementing most of these tasks, and identifies fiscal year 2000–2001 as the deadline for their completion.

Says **Ms. Burkhardt** the planning team recognizes that the plan as it exists now is not the last word on the subject. “We envision an ongoing effort that will help us achieve our goals and enrich our relationship with the community.”



ADDITIONAL GRANT FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNITY-FOCUSED COURT PLANNING TEAMS

The Community-Focused Court Planning Implementation Committee and its co-chairs, **Hon. Judith McConnell** and **Hon. Veronica S. McBeth**, are pleased to announce that the Judicial Council has authorized an additional \$325,000 in technical assistance grant funds for use by county court planning teams. *These funds may be used to cover the cost of employing community-focused court planning consultants, as well as for other reasonable expenses incurred during fiscal year 1999–2000 and specifically associated with community-focused court planning. Such expenses would include travel, meeting venue expenses, advertising and printing, Web site design, and trend and demographic surveys.*

Each county court system is eligible for a minimum of \$5,000 and up to \$9,000. Grant guidelines and applications were distributed to court executive officers and presiding judges in early November. The application deadline is January 5, 2000.

ETHICS COMPENDIUM PROVIDES GUIDELINES FOR JUDGES PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As the products of the **Special Task Force on Court/Community Outreach**, chaired by **Hon. Veronica S. McBeth**, Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Municipal Court, have been shared with California's court community, one of the most discussed topics has been the ethical implications of judicial participation in community outreach activities. The task force's final report provides judges an important resource on this issue.

The task force report includes a comprehensive **ethics compendium** that presents code, case law, and advisory opinion authority related to ethical issues. The compendium is intended to help judges determine appropriate levels and types of involvement in court and community collaboration activities. It complements new section 39 of the Standards of Judicial Administration encouraging community outreach.

In developing the compendium, the task force considered information from the California Judges Association (CJA) and the American Judicature Society, assorted secondary material, including advisory opinions and case law from other states, and treatises by experts in the field of judicial ethics.

The task force's extensive research for the report concluded that while judges must abide by certain constraints imposed by the

California Code of Judicial Ethics, implicit in these same principles and constraints is the notion that judges are leaders in their communities and, as such, have a professional responsibility to ensure that the courts are fulfilling their appropriate role for the preservation of the rule of law in their communities.

The compendium is included in the task force's handbook, *Dialogue—Courts Reaching Out to Their Communities* (see section 6) and may be downloaded as an Adobe Acrobat file from the California Court and Community Collaboration Web site, <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/community/handbook.htm>.

SUPERIOR COURT OF ORANGE COUNTY HOLDS FIRST COURT-COMMUNITY INITIATIVES CONFERENCE

The Community-Focused Court Planning Committee for the Superior Court of Orange County, led by **Hon. Thomas N. Thrasher, Sr.**, held its first Court-Community Initiatives Conference on October 1, 1999, hosting more than 200 business owners, police officers, high school students, city council members, and other community leaders. The day-long event featured workshops in which participants analyzed different aspects of court operations with an eye toward improved responsiveness to community needs. Says **Judge Thrasher**, “The focus of the meeting was to identify the community's perspective regarding court operations today and the community's vision for how the court should operate in order to

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engender public trust and confidence.”

Speaking to conference participants, **Hon. Kathleen E. O’Leary**, Presiding Judge, said, “Through this event, we are trying to change the way we do business. We want to open up a dialogue with the community to strengthen the court.”

Information and ideas gathered at the conference will be used in developing the court’s strategic plan, and efforts are already under way to process and analyze the community’s feedback.

At a postconference planning session on October 2, the planning team and court executive management team met to review, discuss, and summarize conference data with a view toward revising the court’s mission statement and initiating trend analysis. Says **Mary Lou Des Rochers**,

Executive Director, Court Management Services, “The conference was a wonderful success with respect to the views and expectations articulated by the interest-diverse community.”

ACCESS TO JUSTICE RESOURCES GUIDE AVAILABLE

As local courts continue their planning efforts, many county teams have looked at ways to increase access to justice for those in their community unable to afford a lawyer. Many innovative ideas are being considered, including establishment of self-help legal centers, expanded use of pro bono resources, simplification of court forms, increased efforts to remove language barriers, and expanded court-based mediation or other ADR

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programs. As part of that process, several planning teams have looked at the availability of civil legal services for the poor in their area.

A new resource created by the California Access to Justice Commission and the Bench-Bar Pro Bono Project can help. A reference guide titled *Judicial “Equal Access” Activities: Examples and Contact Names* is available for those county teams considering the issue of access to justice. The guide contains specific examples of efforts of courts around the state designed to increase access to justice, along with names and phone numbers of judges, court personnel, and bar members involved in such efforts. The guide also contains a county-by-county list of civil legal services programs around the state. Contact Jack Urquhart at the AOC (415.865.7654) for a free copy of this 39 page guide.



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Happy Holidays!

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Dates to Remember:

December 15, 1999: Final Draft Plan Due at AOC.